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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 001676

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KPAL PTER ASEC UNSC EG IS  
SUBJECT: JERICHO PRISON INCIDENT PROMPTS HARSH REACTION  
FROM EGYPTIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS; POSSIBLE LIMITED  
RETALIATORY STEPS BY GOE

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Presidential Spokesman and Senior Advisor Soliman Awad called the Ambassador late March 15 to share that a parliamentary committee had severely grilled a senior Ministry of Foreign Affairs official March 14 during an emergency session to address the Jericho prison incident. Awad explained that MP's called for the GOE to take forceful steps against Israel. Awad shared that the committee meeting was attended by a large percentage of Muslim Brotherhood adherents who called for Egypt to recall its ambassador, send home Israel's ambassador, and take other punitive measures. Awad clearly intended the call to impress upon the Ambassador the extent of domestic pressures being put on the GOE regarding its relationship with Israel and the Palestinians after the Jericho incident, as well as the MB's bellicosity towards U.S. interests.

¶2. (C) Poloff met March 16 with the MFA official who briefed the MP's, Assistant Minister for Arab Affairs Hani Khalaf, to discuss Parliament's reaction to the Jericho incident. Khalaf shared that the Peoples Assembly's Committee on Arab Affairs had hastily organized an emergency meeting to discuss the issue, and requested the MFA to brief its 40 members late March 14. Khalaf said that many of those who attended (30-35) were independent MP's affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. The MP's, he said, harshly criticized the GOE and accused it of reacting in a "soft and trembling" manner to the crisis, as well as to Israeli threats to kill Hamas PM designate Haniyah. One member, he said, even questioned the usefulness of the Egyptian military if it could not be used to threaten action against Israel.

¶3. (C) Khalaf described comments from Parliamentarians as "far-fetched," and asserted that he had succeeded in "calming down" the group by rationally explaining GOE policies. Egypt, he said, understood Israeli actions at Jericho to be related to domestic pre-election politics and posturing toward Hamas, and therefore the GOE should not overreact. Egypt's primary objective during the crisis, he said, was to ensure the five Palestinians sought by Israel were not killed during the operation. Responding to a question on further reactions by the GOE, Khalaf said a report was under review on next steps, including a proposal that Egyptian Ambassador to Israel, Mohamed Assem, return to Cairo for "three or four days" to brief Parliament on Egypt's policy vis-a-vis Israel and the Palestinians.

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